

Bowen Family Systems Theory from a Cultural Perspective: An Integrative Framework

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**ABSTRACT**

Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST) is one of the most established and influential schools of family therapy. The hallmark of the theory lies in the concept of *differentiation-of-self (DoS)*, the individual's ability to balance separateness and connectedness in intimate relationships. DoS resembles the construct of self-construal in its definitive content, yet culture is rarely defined as a context of development in its relevant processes. In the current paper, we discuss DoS through a cultural lens and propose an integrative framework to expand BFST and its premises to be more culturally inclusive and comprehensive. To that aim, we propose a coherent integration of Kağıtçıbaşı's (1996) Family Change Theory and Carter and McGoldrick's (1988) multicultural perspective. We believe such integration will have potential contributions to our understanding of DoS with significant implications for future family science research and clinical practice.

*Keywords:* Bowen Family Systems Theory, Family Change Theory, autonomy, relatedness, self-construal, differentiation-of-self, multiculturalism.

### **Bowen Family Systems Theory from a Cultural Perspective: An Integrative Framework**

From the earliest development of family therapy, Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST; Bowen, 1972; 1978) has been a prominent systemic perspective guiding research and practice in the field of family science. Indeed, BFST found empirical support for its major concepts and premises (i.e. differentiation-of-self, multigenerational transmission; Miller, Anderson & Keala, 2004) and his theory was successfully implemented in interventions targeting marital conflict (i.e., Yektatalab, Seddigh Oskouee, & Sodani, 2016), sexual problems (i.e., Magnuson & Shaw, 2003), and adolescent identity development (i.e., Parker, Bermudez & Neustifter, 2008).

Nevertheless, BFST was not immune to critique; particularly from Feminist (Knudson-Martin, 1994; Leupnitz, 1988) and Multicultural (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988; McGoldrick, 1995; 2011) approaches for decades. Several theorists questioned the universality of BFST concepts and their clinical applications in regards to ethnicity and race (Boyd-Franklin, 1989), gender (Hare-Mustin, 1987), and culture (Falicov, 1995). Among those critiques, Carter & McGoldrick's (1988) multicultural perspective of family therapy emphasized the role of cultural diversity and pluralism in interpretation of family life cycle across generations. Yet, the definition of culture in multicultural practice and research appears to be still *emic* in our field, that is, studies are specific to racial, ethnic, and/or gender differences *within* a given culture or a specific country (i.e., Latino American families in the US). On the other hand, there is accumulation of cross-cultural research on family science which focuses on the *etic* aspects of culture and encompasses diversity *across* cultures (Bell et al., 1996; 2007; Bell, Bell, & Nakata, 2001; İmamoğlu, 2003; İmamoğlu & Karakitapoglu-Aygun, 2004). Those studies challenge Bowen's (1978) idea that individuation and relatedness are opposing ends of the same spectrum.

It is apparent that discussion of culture and diversity in family science and therapy, particularly in BFST, is vibrant and ongoing. In the current paper, we aim to join that discussion by focusing on Bowen's (1978) *differentiation-of-self* (DoS) and expanding that concept using a cultural perspective. We propose that an integration of Kağıtçıbaşı's (1996) Family Change Theory (a well-established and an empirically validated model in social, developmental, and cross-cultural psychology) and Carter & McGoldrick's (1988) cultural framework will enable us to have a more *etic* approach to understanding DoS as well as family processes in a given cultural context.

### ***Bowen Family Systems Theory and differentiation-of-self***

Bowen (1978) proposed that the driving force for families is anxiety over balance of separateness and connectedness among family members across generations. The *differentiation-of-self* (DoS), in that framework, guides the adaptive strategies to regulate emotional distance of family members from one another. DoS is defined as the capacity of an individual to exert their own autonomy whilst still maintaining an emotional connection to the relationship system (Bowen, 1978). Levels of DoS are in a continuum, where the high end indicates a healthy balance of separateness and connectedness at an interpersonal level and a distinction between thought and emotional processes at the intrapersonal level. The low end of DoS indicates high levels of emotional interdependency, an extreme emotional connection with others as well as lack of distinction between feelings and thoughts. The low end of DoS may indicate fusion, whose intensity may create tension in the family system at times and even lead to emotional cut-off, conflict, or triangulation between family members (Bowen, 1978).

***Empirical support for the BFST concepts and premises***

There is accumulation of empirical evidence on the validity and utility of Bowen's (1978) DoS and its association with intrapersonal and interpersonal processes. Research shows that individuals with lower levels of differentiation experience higher psychological distress (Krycak, Murdock & Marszalek, 2012) and daily stress (Murdock & Gore, 2004). Differentiation has been linked with psychological adjustment, well-being, and self-control (Sandage & Jankowski, 2010; Showers & Ryff, 1996; Skowron, Wester & Azen, 2004). Consistent with BFST, mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, somatization and obsessive-compulsive symptoms are found to be common among individuals with lower levels of differentiation (Jankowski & Hooper, 2012; Knauth, Skowron & Esobar, 2006).

In addition to psychological well-being, DoS is linked positively to aspects of relational well-being and satisfaction. Studies indicate that high DoS predicts better interpersonal functioning and higher marital satisfaction and quality (Gubbins, Perosa, & Bartle-Haring, 2010; Lampis, 2016; Peleg, 2008; Rodríguez-González et al., 2016; Timm & Keiley, 2011). On the other hand, individuals with higher emotional reactivity and emotional cut-off (i.e. low DoS) report greater interpersonal problems (Wei, Vigel, Ku, & Zakalik, 2005). Taken together, there is empirical support for Bowen's idea that differentiation is closely linked to healthy functioning at individual, relational, and family levels.

***Challenges of the BFST and need for a multicultural framework: Contributions of Carter and McGoldrick***

While being widely utilized in the field of family science and therapy, BFST does have its share of criticisms. Even though the theory is intended to be universal, intergenerational, and systemic, there is limited research that examined the BFST concepts in a cross-cultural manner

(see Bell, Bell, & Nakata, 2001 for an exception). The majority of the empirical support for BFST concepts comes from studies conducted in the US with clinical samples, some of which included individuals or couples recruited through university training clinics (Miller, Anderson, & Keals, 2004) while some other studies were conducted with high school and college students (i.e., Parker, Bermudez & Neustifter, 2008; Skowron, Stanely & Shapiro, 2009). Nevertheless, few studies tested BFST premises in non-US contexts and those studies usually indicated mixed findings.

For instance, a study in South Korea (Kim, et al., 2014) investigated the association between the BFST concepts (DoS, I-position, fusion, emotional reactivity, and emotional cut-off) and family functioning (family adaptability and cohesion) in a sample of adults, aged 20 to 70 years. On one hand, results supported BFST; high differentiation group reported higher levels of family functioning, greater family satisfaction, and more positive family communication when compared to the low differentiation group. On the other hand, results were contrary to BFST premises; the individuals who had more “fused” relationships with others were more likely to have balanced levels of cohesion in their families as assessed by FACES IV. These findings indicated that high fusion and high DoS could co-exist in the same cultural context and they could promote better family functioning.

As such, the interplay between processes related to the DoS and culture is complex and needs further empirical and theoretical work. Several researchers argued that contextualizing DoS in a continuum of separateness and connectedness is a culture-bound assumption because, in some cultures, separateness and connectedness are simply independent constructs (Bell et al., 2007; İmamoğlu, 2003). Therefore, there are variations within and across cultures in the ways in which ‘healthy’ connectedness and ‘healthy’ separateness are defined (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996;

Markus & Kitayama, 1991). For instance, research conducted in Turkey (i.e., Kağıtçıbaşı & Ataca, 2005), provided support for the co-existence of high connectedness and high separateness which was associated with healthy functioning. Furthermore, studies from Japan (i.e., Bell, Bell, & Nakata, 2001), South Korea (i.e., Chung & Gale, 2006), Taiwan, and Thailand (i.e., Neff, Pisitsungkagarn, & Hsieh, 2008) indicated that being high in connectedness and low in separateness was not necessarily linked to family processes such as fusion, cut-off, or triangulation. Rather, high connectedness promoted a sense of belonging and healthy identity and family development.

These cross-cultural findings call for attention to the ‘context’ in which DoS and family system are embedded. In fact, a cultural critique of family research is not a new one. One major critique came from Carter and McGoldrick (1980; 1988) who criticized early family therapy pioneers, including Bowen, of being culture-, class-, race-, and gender-blind in their conceptualization of family dynamics as well as clinical practice. They advocated for a paradigm shift in family therapy by including issues around diversity and multiculturalism in conceptualization, treatment, and research. Their critical framework expanded upon BFST concepts through inclusion of cultural and historical processes of families across generations in the last three decades. In that framework, DoS is re-defined as a byproduct of one’s family history and relational patterns that are transmitted across generations. Yet, that family history is embedded in multiple supra systems of culture, race, ethnicity, and social class. We believe Carter and McGoldrick’s (1980; 1988) contribution enabled us to re-define DoS as a more multifaceted and fluid concept that evolves over time in both directions. As shown in Figure 1, DoS can be conceptualized within that time-framework with horizontal time dimension representing family life cycle and vertical time dimension representing history of the family

across generations. Using that framework, we can re-conceptualize ‘healthy balance of connectedness and separateness’ depending on unique family story of the person, the life cycle s/he is going through in her family (i.e., marriage), relational patterns and gender roles across generations, socio-demographic characteristics, and even ongoing social events of the era (i.e., war, oppression, discrimination). In other words, Carter and McGoldrick’s (1988) perspective enables us to take into account the ‘adaptability’ aspect of DoS while we examine the extent to which it is functional in a given context.

McGoldrick (2011) advises us to *go home again* and dig into our family secrets and stories to better understand who we truly are because (she believes) “family will inevitably come back to haunt us” (p. 22). She genuinely acknowledges the role of culture in conceptualizing our family stories as she writes “In cultures that focus on family or community functioning rather than on the individual, expression of individuality will look different than in an Anglo-European context. Ignoring such cultural differences leads to errors.” (p. 21). Nevertheless, we believe such approach still stays in the limits of an *emic* understanding of culture which is a contextualized ‘uniqueness’ approach of understanding families of different ethnicities in US or Europe or immigrant families in those contexts. This emic approach is still rooted in the premise of ‘universalism’ of family processes, or in her own works “Although each family is unique in its particular history, all families are similar in their underlying patterns.” (p. 24). Instead, we believe it is time to question if there are truly ‘universal’ family processes related to DoS. We propose cross-cultural psychology discipline, with concepts of individualism-collectivism, self-construal, and autonomy-relatedness offers invaluable framework to understand DoS in a more *etic* way.

### *Culture and Self*

While Carter and McGoldrick (1980) were discussing culture, gender, race, and ethnicity in family therapy and BFST, cross-cultural psychology was emerging as a critical subdiscipline to challenge the mainstream psychology. Starting from 1970s, early pioneers of cross-cultural psychology (Harry Triandis, John Berry, Ype Poortinga, Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı, and Marshall Segall) questioned the utility, validity, generalizability, and replicability of the Western psychological research and its premises in the majority world. Topics of interest varied immensely from self, identity development to parenting and attachment, while the researchers shared a common perspective in their critique of hidden principle of ‘universalism’ in academic research. Similar to Carter & McGoldrick (1980), early pioneers advocated for an understanding of psychological phenomena in relation to culture and its variations, rather than simply the individual and his/her core characteristics (i.e., Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai & Lucca, 1988).

Furthermore, they introduced concepts to contextualize cultures in a continuum of individualism and collectivism. In that framework, culture was defined more broadly as the shared way of life of a group of people with shared attitudes, beliefs, norms, role and self-definitions and values organized around a theme (Berry et al., 2011; Triandis, 1996). Such definition of culture indicated reflections of internal processes within the individual (i.e., psychological processes that can affect the behavior), rather than contextualizing culture through solely externalized factors, such as shared symbols, objects, language. That definition, therefore, is an intersection point for us to integrate the cross-cultural psychology and Carter and McGoldrick’s perspective (1980) because Carter and McGoldrick also argue that culture is an internalized process that is ‘inevitably’ transmitted across generations.

One key dimension that could be an important contribution to re-conceptualize DoS is the continuum of individualism-collectivism. According to Triandis (1996; 2001), individualistic societies (cultures of separateness; i.e., the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom) foster autonomy and independence of the individual and prioritize personal goals and achievement over the interest of the ingroups. Conversely, collectivistic societies (cultures of relatedness; i.e., Japan, India, China), prioritize ingroup harmony and belonging over their personal goals. In such cultures, individuals tend to shape their behaviors according to the group norms and expectations (Triandis, 1996; 2001).

It is under this dimension of individualism-collectivism that we can observe differences in self-construals amongst people (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Markus and Kitayama (1991) define self-construal as the beliefs one has about one's own self, the nature of which may differ due to the significance that is given to the private and inner aspects of the self, versus the public and relational aspects. Independent self-construal, characterized by autonomous, separate from the social context, is marked by clearly defined boundaries between the self and others and is embedded in Individualistic and Western cultures. On the hand, interdependent self-construal, is characterized by view of the self as more connected with others, (not separated from the social context) with more permeable boundaries between the self and other people, making the self-other relationships the focus of the self in regulating behavior (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Such self-construal is engendered by collectivistic and non-Western cultures<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> One common misconception of this framework is to categorize cultures as if they exist in uniformity. Quite the opposite, cross-cultural psychology conceptualizes self-construal in relation to individualism-collectivism continuum of the immediate context of the individual with attention to subcultures as well as individual's socio-economic status, religion, and gender roles.

One key distinction between cross-cultural frameworks and BFST comes from this understanding of interpersonal boundaries. In BFST, diffused boundaries among self and other family members may indicate an imbalance of separateness and connectedness, which may be associated with violation of one's privacy or failure to maintain autonomy. Yet, Markus and Kitayama (1991) argue that such processes may simply indicate a cultural dimension, rather than an individual- or family-level processes, especially for families in collectivistic societies. Nevertheless, the unidimensional individualism-collectivism paradigm was expanded by Kağıtçıbaşı (1996), whose theory may be a better fit for us to understand DoS in relation to culture.

### ***Kağıtçıbaşı's Family Change Theory and four major self-construals***

Consistent with Bell, Bell, and Nakata (2001) and İmamoğlu (2003), Kağıtçıbaşı<sup>2</sup> (1996; 2005; 2007) argued that self-construal develops in the family system as a function of larger cultural context and separateness and connectedness are two different dimensions of self. Kağıtçıbaşı (1996) introduces the terms, Autonomy and Relatedness as two basic needs that can co-exist within an individual. Autonomy refers to “the state of being a self-governing agent,” and relatedness refers to “the degree of connection with others.” These two dimensions of agency and interpersonal distance underlie the self, the relations of self with others, and social behavior (Figure 2).

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<sup>2</sup> Due to page limitations and scope of the paper, we cannot extensively review Kağıtçıbaşı's four decades of research and her contributions to social, developmental, and cultural psychology. Using the FCT perspective, Kağıtçıbaşı wrote prolifically on self and culture, parenting and value of children across cultures, early childhood education, gender, positive adolescent development, and program evaluation. Her publication record includes over 200 articles and 13 books in English. For a complete list of her publications, research projects, and accomplishments, please see <https://mysite.ku.edu.tr/ckagit/>.

Kağıtçıbaşı's Theory of Family Change (FCT, 1996) synthesizes the effects of family processes, family socioeconomic status, and cultural context to explain the emergence of different self-construals. Kağıtçıbaşı's empirical work that laid the foundations of her theory dates back to her Value of Children (VoC) study in 1975, which was a nationally representative study of parental attitudes of fertility in Turkey as part of a cross-cultural research consortium across nine countries<sup>3</sup>. Accumulating empirical evidence from VoC, Kağıtçıbaşı (1982) found that parents have different motives for having children depending on their socio-economic status and cultural context which promote different family models and self-construals. For instance, in low income and/or rural contexts, the child has an economic utility as s/he contributes economically to the family while s/he is young and is perceived as a potential caregiver for aging parents in the future<sup>4</sup>. Hence, in a family where children have an economic and instrumental value, high independence of children is discouraged while loyalty, belonging, and interdependence are promoted. Such family models would fit in rural areas of developing countries and underdeveloped countries where family models of interdependence are common (Figure 2).

Conversely, in urbanized, industrialized, and/or high income societies, child has a psychological utility (i.e., bringing joy to the family), but also an economic cost for the family. In that socio-economic and cultural context, independence of a child is more likely to be accepted and encouraged. Furthermore, in societies or communities undergoing economic and social transition, value of children may also be shifting from economic utility to psychological utility, and therefore, both child rearing patterns may be visible where autonomy and relatedness

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<sup>3</sup> Other participating countries were Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, USA, and the Federal Republic of Germany.

<sup>4</sup> Kağıtçıbaşı wrote extensively on gender and value of children. We do not go into detail on gender differences in her cross-cultural studies as the scope of the paper is culture and DoS, rather than gender.

are being promoted simultaneously. A 30 year follow up study to the original VoC study supported that hypothesis: as socio-economic conditions of societies changed, so did value of children, family models, and self-construals (Kağıtçıbaşı & Ataca, 2005).

Kağıtçıbaşı proposes that three prototypical normative family models (Family Model of Independence, Family Model of Interdependence, and Family Model of Psychological Interdependence) emerge due to those values attributed to children and a fourth model emerges as a neglecting family. Each family model is characterized by unique child rearing patterns, which, in turn, engender the development of different types of self-construal of the child. The four distinctive self-construals, defined by their levels of autonomy and relatedness, are the autonomous-separate self, heteronomous-separate self, autonomous-related self, and heteronomous-related self (Figure 2).

The autonomous-separate self is very high on autonomy and low on relatedness and is a product of the promotion of self-reliance orientation in child rearing and permissive parenting. This sort of self is found within the Family Model of Independence which is embedded in cultures of separateness (i.e., individualistic cultures) as characterized in affluent, urbanized, and industrialized societies. Conversely, the development of the heteronomous-related self, defined by low agency and high interpersonal distance, is engendered by authoritarian parenting with obedience orientations in child rearing. Such parenting is characteristic of the Family Model of Interdependence, which is usually found in agrarian and close-knit societies, situated within cultures of relatedness (i.e. collectivistic cultures).

The Family Model of Psychological Interdependence is a synthesis of the previous two models and is characterized by authoritative parenting that allows the child to develop an autonomous-related self and enables the child to have a sense of both agency and closeness to

significant others. This model is found often in developing countries which have been undergoing economic growth. In such countries, adult children have relatively limited dependence on their families-of-origin as compared to adult children of collectivistic countries, yet they strive to retain intimacy with significant others.

The fourth type of self, the heteronomous-separate self is also observed, although it does not correspond to a specific cultural context. This self develops in a hierarchical neglectful family that is indifferent to child-rearing. This type of self has very little agency and low interpersonal distance with others.

### ***Empirical support for Kağıtçıbaşı's FCT***

The family patterns suggested by FCT have been studied in a number of different countries and there is accumulation of empirical evidence that such family models and respective self-construals exist in their hypothesized cultures. Specifically, Mayer, Trommsdorff, Kağıtçıbaşı & Mishra (2012) found that family models of independence were found in Germany (a culture characterized by high individualism); family models of interdependence were found in India (a culture characterized by high collectivism); and a family model of psychological interdependence was found in Turkish participants (a culture that gives importance to aspects of both individualism and collectivism).

Kağıtçıbaşı (2007) argues that the autonomous-related self is the most psychologically sound type of self as it meets the two basic needs: separateness and connectedness in congruence with the cultural and family context. Research has shown that having these basic needs met is associated with well-being (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe & Ryan, 2000) as well as better mental health, such as reductions in depressive symptoms, anxiety, and somatization (Ryan, Patrick, Deci, & Williams, 2008). In addition, it has been found that parent-adolescent interactions,

characterized by both autonomy and relatedness promoting behavior, protect adolescents against the harmful effects of stressful life events, such as somatic complaints, depressive symptoms and anxiety issues (Willemen, Scheungel, & Koot, 2011).

In a test of a cultural model of vulnerability to distress, people with interdependent self-construals increased the likelihood of having thoughts of losing connection with others and developing a fear of being excluded from their ingroup. This in turn was associated with higher levels of anxiety, and anxiety mediated the effect of these thoughts on depression (Mak, Law, & Teng, 2010). Results indicated that while interdependent self-construals made a person more vulnerable to develop a fear of losing connectedness with others, the construal itself was negatively related to depression, indicating that maintaining bonds with others was adaptive for such individuals (Mak, Law, & Teng, 2010). Such outcomes imply that a balance of both autonomy and connectedness are needed to maintain psychological health.

Research suggests that fulfillment of the needs of autonomy and relatedness is associated with better psychological well-being in a number of domains and social settings including education, parenting, exercise, sports, work, and close relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Evidence suggests that autonomy-relatedness is also a key factor for marital relationships. Dana Vanoy (1999) proposed that stable marriages are more likely to be achieved if the individuals in them develop capacity for both intimacy as well as autonomy. Research demonstrates that fulfillment of both autonomy and relatedness was linked to higher levels of marital/ romantic relationship satisfaction amongst couples (Patrick, Knee, Canevello & Lonsbary, 2007; Rankin-Esquer, Burnett, Baucom and Epstein, 1997; Zimmer-Gembeck, Arnhold & Connolly, 2014). Celenk, van de Vijver, and Goodwin (2011) also found that autonomy-relatedness was associated with high levels of relationship satisfaction among both British and Turkish couples, highlighting

that this phenomenon was seen in two distinct types of cultures (Independent and Psychologically-Interdependent).

***An integrative framework: Systemic, intergenerational, and cultural processes***

In sum, we propose integrating Kağıtçıbaşı's FCT and Carter and McGoldrick's (1988) Multicultural framework and Family Life Cycle perspective to re-define normative family processes in BFST (See Figure 3). We believe such integration will address the challenges of BFST and offer more culturally inclusive research and practice in our field. It appears that BFST concepts, particularly DoS, are highly relevant to family processes of separateness and connectedness. Yet, there is considerable cross-cultural research evidence showing that needs for interpersonal distance and needs for agency are independent constructs and they vary across and within cultures. Therefore, FCT dimensions of family models and self-construals need to be taken into account as we define 'normative' family processes.

Inspired by Kağıtçıbaşı's (1996) FCT, we argue that DoS evolves differently in family models of independence, interdependence, and psychological interdependence as a function of different self-construals. All those potential family models are situated within individualism-collectivism dimension of culture (Figure 3). Therefore, a healthy balance of separateness and connectedness (or in Kağıtçıbaşı's words, autonomy and relatedness) vary depending on culture at both societal and family levels. The socio-cultural characteristics that impact DoS include cultural value of children, child-rearing practices, urban vs. rural settlement, nuclear vs. extended families, and socioeconomic status. In that model, DoS is a fluid and an adaptive process in constant interaction with cultural demands and norms. While Kağıtçıbaşı's (1996) FCT adds depth to the integrative model by situating self-construal in models of families (independence vs psychological interdependence vs interdependence) and cultures (individualism and

collectivism), Carter and McGoldrick's (1980; 1988) perspective adds interactions of culture and time dimensions to the model. Since FCT is a theoretical framework primarily designed to be used as a heuristic to understand functional and causal links between society/culture, family, and self (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007), it does not expand on specific and unique patterns in the families that can foster family function and dysfunction. Therefore, Carter and McGoldrick's (1988) perspective, if integrated with the FCT, can help us to conceptualize specific developmental pathways of families and selves across multiple generations.

Consistent with Carter and McGoldrick's (1980; 1988) perspective, we propose that self-construal is a reflection of DoS which is a fluid and dynamic concept that evolves over time through family life cycles (i.e., marriage, birth of a first child), environmental stressors (i.e., natural disasters), and/or family history and legacy (i.e., family secrets, immigration). Thus, time is two dimensional in the model: horizontal time indicates development of self-construal through family life cycle and vertical time indicates intergenerational transmission of family values, relational patterns, secrets and their impact on the self-construal across generations. These dimensions are in interaction with family members' cultural background and multiple identities (inclusive of gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, sexual orientation). We believe Kağıtçıbaşı's (1996) and Carter and McGoldrick's (1988) models complement each other to create a more *etic* approach in situating self-construal as a reflection of DoS.

### ***Implications for research, practice, and conclusions***

An integrative (systemic-cultural) framework of BFST has significant implications for family science research as well as family therapy practice. It appears that in a globalized world, it is time to 'move margin to the center,' in other words, use cultural groups as their own points of reference when we define family processes and DoS in a continuum of functional vs.

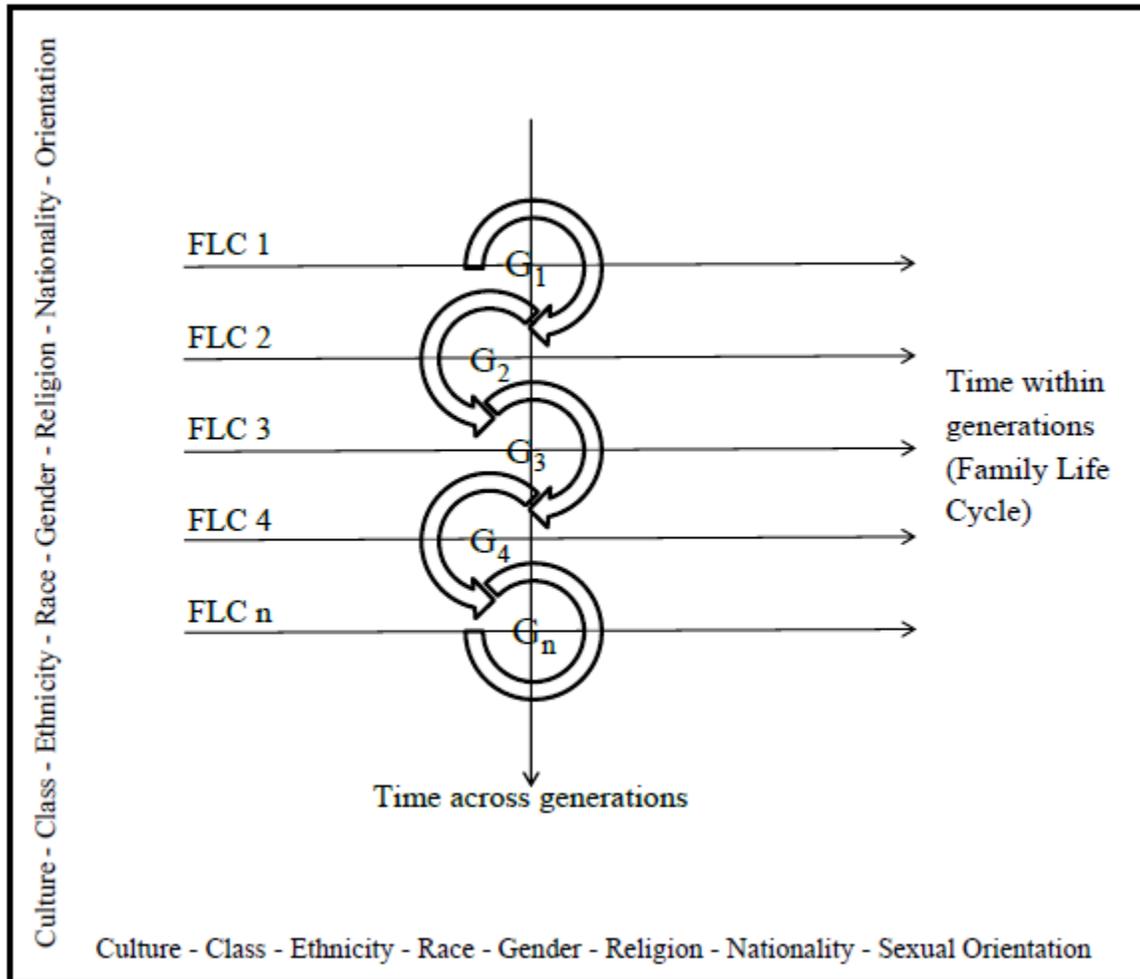
dysfunctional processes. We acknowledge that multicultural counseling and cultural family therapy emerged as a critique of color, gender, class, and culture-blind family theories. Yet, issues of interest stayed limited with the socio-political dynamics of the US context and there is need for further exploration of ‘other’ cultures (such as cultures of the developing world).

The current paper is an attempt to expand on that cultural framework with integration of Kağıtçıbaşı’s (1996) FCT and Carter and McGoldrick’s (1988) multicultural perspective. We believe a truly cross-cultural framework has the potential to change the ways in which we define DoS and design research projects on BFST concepts. Yet, a cross-cultural perspective has also the potential to shift how we relate to our participants/clients and define our roles and identities as researchers and/or therapists. Using the integrative model, one can benefit from several reflective process questions: “Where do my self-construal and my family model fall under this picture?” “How do I define myself cross-culturally?” and “How does culture influence my research, my approach in understanding family relationships, and my interpretations?”

It is evident that such reflection would benefit quantitative family science researchers to a greater extent than qualitative researchers because these process questions are directly related to the ecological validity of selected measures, assessment tools, and research findings. Consistent with FCT premises, there is empirical evidence that participants from cultures of independence and interdependence respond to surveys differently, especially in areas of relationships and self-construals (Berry et al., 2011). In other words, participants are different not only in their self-construals and family models, but also in ways in which they express those differences.

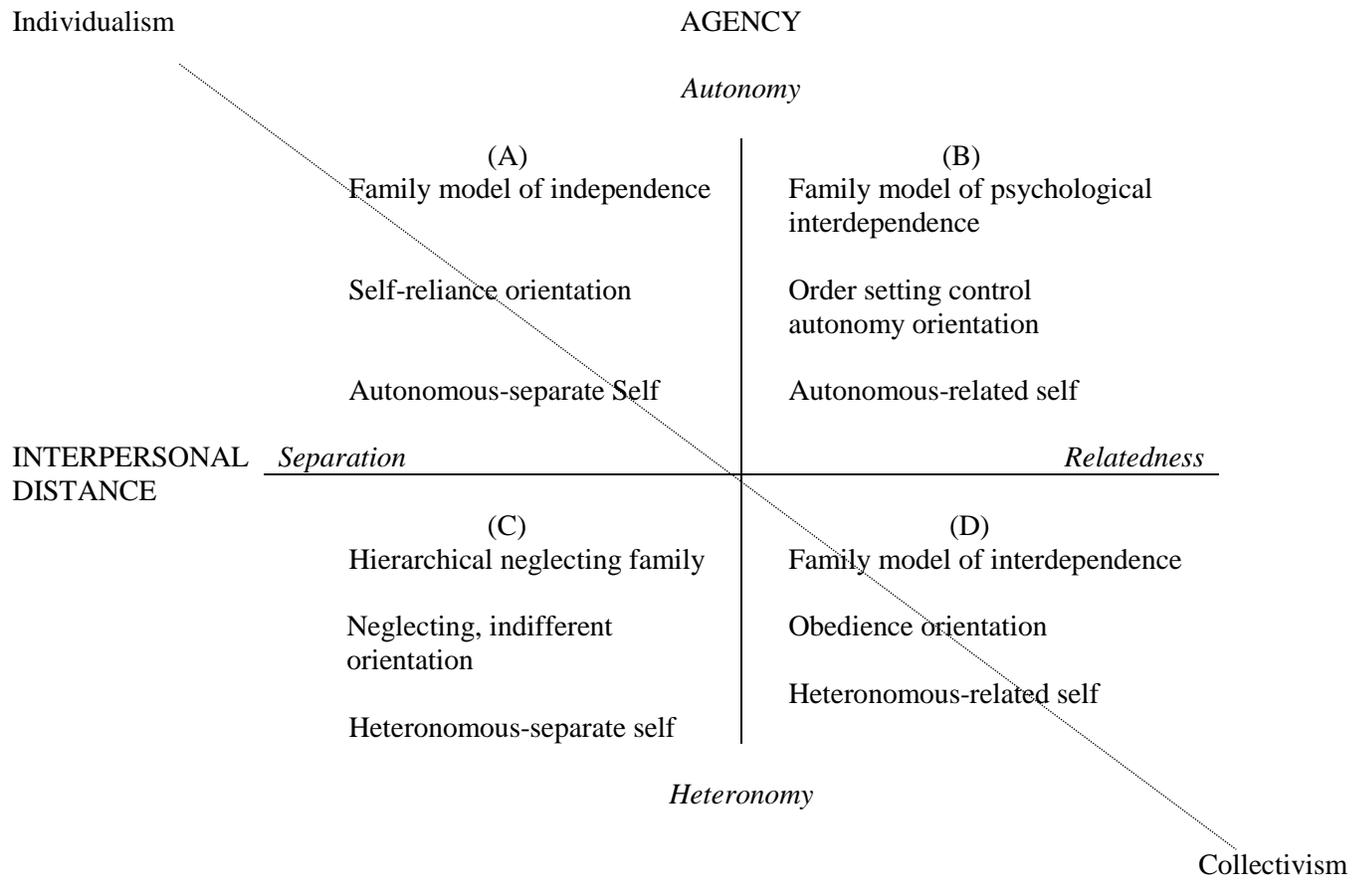
We strongly believe new emerging areas of research in family science (i.e., undocumented immigrant families, refugees, fatherhood, intermarriages, fertility) would benefit immensely from a more inclusive and *etic* cultural framework by borrowing concepts from the

rich literature of cross-cultural psychology. The current paper is an attempt to integrate Kağıtçıbaşı's FCT with Carter & McGoldrick's perspective and BFST, yet cross-cultural psychology offers many other opportunities and theories for family scientists to integrate in their research. We hope the current paper stimulates fellow family scientists to pursue their research interests in a more cross-cultural and critical perspective and comparing family processes across independent, interdependent, and psychologically interdependent cultures. Let us design comparative and multinational studies that are inclusive of not only silenced communities in US, but also communities of the majority world. And most importantly, let us conduct well-designed replication studies in different cultural contexts adhering to different self-construals. Only then, we can advance the family science to be truly interdisciplinary and inclusive of families of all types.

**Figure 1.** Time perspective in Family Systems Theory by Socio-cultural Context

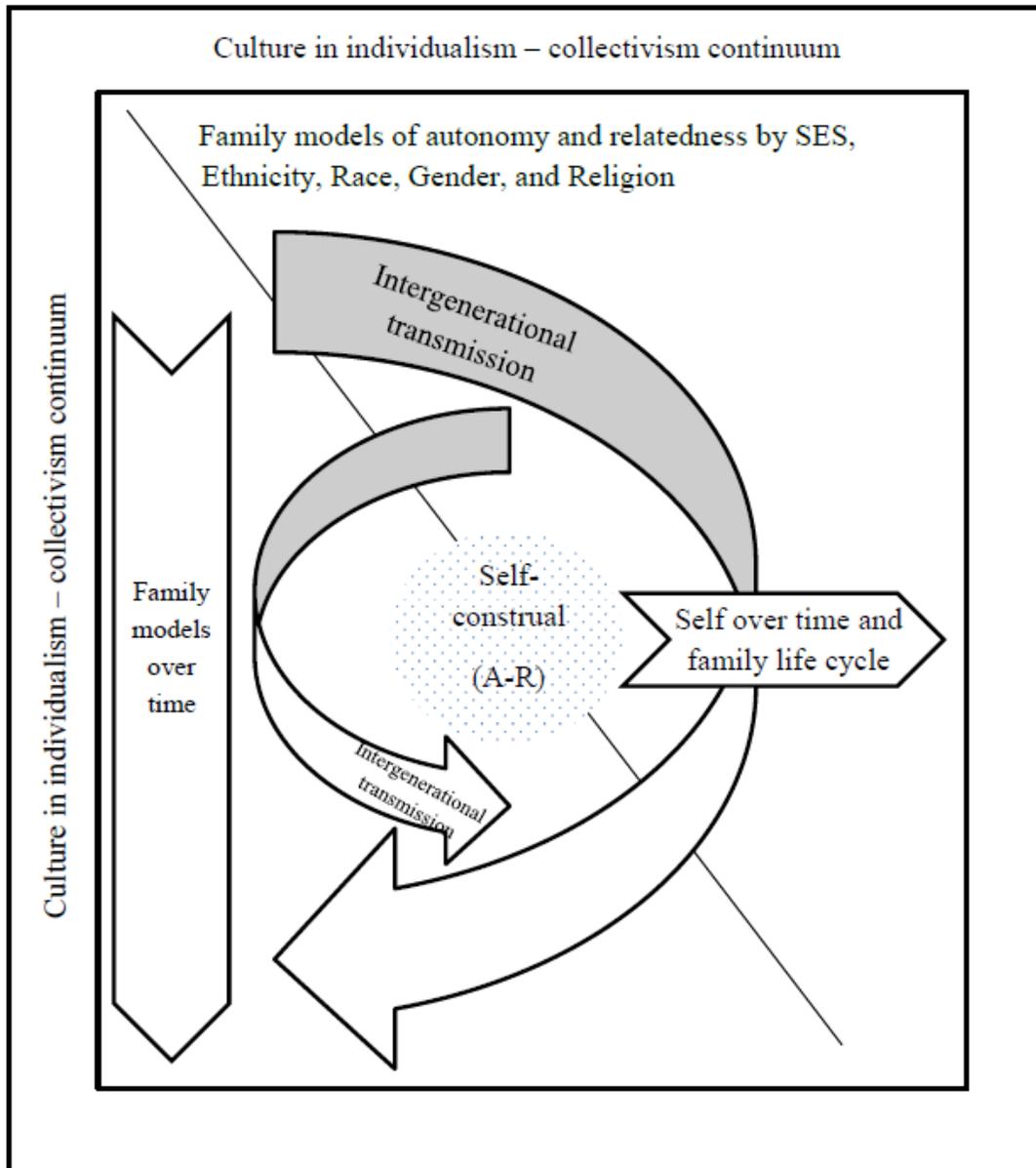
*Note:* Figure is a visual representation of Carter and McGoldrick's (1988) Family Life Cycle perspective and Multicultural Framework. G = Generation, FLC = Family Life Cycle, and arrows indicate time/process.

**Figure 2.** Agency Interpersonal Distance and the Types of Selves in Cultural Context.



*Note:* Figure is adapted from ‘Autonomy and Relatedness in Cultural Context: Implications for Self and Family’ (p.412) by Ç. Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005. Individualism-Collectivism dimension is added by the authors.

**Figure 3:** A cultural-systemic perspective of self over time across cultures



*Note:* Family models include models of independence, psychological interdependence, and interdependence, embedded in individualism-collectivism dimension, SES, child rearing practices, gender, rural/urban setting, class, race, and ethnicity as suggested by Kağıtçıbaşı (1996; 2005). Self-construal (a re-defined differentiation of self) is two-dimensional although dimensions of agency and interpersonal distance are not shown in the figure for simplicity. All processes change over time, consistent with intergenerational framework and family life cycle perspective (Carter & McGoldrick, 1988).

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